

Kathy Gille

Executive Floor Assistant, Representative David Bonior of Michigan

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Accessing the Boys' Club

Kathy Gille reflects on what she learned as the lone woman among floor assistants.

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I can think of one example of something that came up when I was in the Chief Deputy Whip role and that's when there really were quite not very many women around and not, not other women who were floor assistants. They had, they had something called the "floor boys," which was, I think, like a night out—it seemed like every week they went out and had drinks and steaks and, you know, lobbyists paid for it. I knew it existed and I knew I wasn't invited to it. And I, I thought a lot about whether I wanted to—you know, and I talk about whether you want to bang the door down—and I thought, "Did I really even want to go into that room? Did I want to be there? Did I want to be doing that?" And I also had to step back and think, you know, "What's my goal? Why am I here?" By then I was very deeply involved in the efforts to stop the wars in Central America and that was an all-consuming job. I did not actually need to be going out late at night for drinks and steaks. I needed to get up early in the morning and do my job. But I, I often use that example to tell younger women that, because I think what it—it's always a question to me whether I should have raised the issue. "Am I being excluded as a woman? Am I not having access to the kind of currency of the day? The relationship, the boys' club? And is that diminishing my effectiveness?" That, that was usually the way I looked at it. And I would step—I would always step back and say, "What's my goal? And, do I need this to get to my goal?" And I think the way I did that actually helped me develop kind of a larger sense of strategic skills. I mean, it's sort of the way I teach strategy now. And when I do communication strategy, I make people sit down and say, "What's your goal?" And I think that process of my having to do that over and over again because I was a woman, because I would sometimes wonder, "Am I being excluded because of this?" I—it made me tougher, and smarter, and more strategic. So—and I think I made the right choice—most of the time.